

Waiting

You have no idea what it's like, being the boyfriend of a Slayer.

Sure, you probably envy me, and why not?

I've got a good car, a good job and one of the most beautiful women in the world as my girlfriend. Even if, and this is a big if, you knew she was a Slayer, you'd still think it was cool. After all, who doesn't want a girlfriend that saves the world, regularly? And shows a remarkable ability to avoid permanent death.

Yeah, I say permanent, 'cause she's died a few times. I saved her once. Willow - she's the cute redhead I am always spending time with - used her magic to bring her back the second time.

OK, I'm drifting off the point here, I know.

Damn it, now I've forgotten where I was.

Oh, yeah. Boyfriend of a slayer.

I guess every man, at some level, feels a certain protectiveness towards his partner. He worries about her when she is out of sight or when she's late getting home. Of course, we hide it, we don't want to be accused of over protectiveness or something, do we?

Well, it's worse for me. Your partner might just come home late, having missed her train. Mine actively courts the night. She hangs around in cemeteries, waiting for vampires, demons, Hellgods or anything else that decides that tonight is a good night to try and end the world.

I often wonder if Satan is a fan of Pinky and the Brain, and if all these vampires and what not are the Pinky to his Brain.

So, tonight is a typical night.

I got home from work, and made her dinner. A Slayer's appetite is a wonder to behold. Her metabolism must burn up a hell of a lot of calories, because if I ate that much...well, I wouldn't need a suit to be Puffy Xander.

We settled on the couch for a bit, watching some mindless TV while we talked about our days. She tells me some of the problems she encounters at work, and it makes you realise how screwed up kids

are, and how screwed up we were.

I love the quiet time with Buffy, it's the one of the few times I feel that I don't have to share her with the rest of the world. It's a time when she's not some mystical warrior, not some super-human with the world's fate literally resting on her shoulders, she's just a young woman, lying on the couch with her boyfriend.

So, after a while, she sighed and stood up. She told me she was going on patrol, and that I should stay.

Normally, I try and go with her as much as possible, but, I have a big meeting in the morning, and in temporary a fit of responsibility towards my job, I agreed.

Now, I don't like it to sound like my job is everything to me, it's not. But it is very important. To start with, it pays the mortgage and food. Since Buffy and I live together in her Mom's old house, I felt it was only right that I pay the bills, and we use the salary Buffy gets for entertainment.

I know Dawn's happy with this arrangement. Of course, the fact that I have a widescreen HDTV may have sweetened the deal a little, not to mention my DVD player.

After Buffy left, I followed my usual routine. Late night TV, a snack around midnight, then crawl into bed and read till she gets back. Yeah, no sleep, which is why I spend thirty minutes asking myself why I didn't go with her.

I think that one of the real reasons is trust. Trust and honesty. Let me explain. I remember, when I was a kid, watching one of those stupid daytime TV shows. You know, the ones like Springer is now, where a bunch of rednecks come on stage and yell at each other for half an hour.

Anyway, one of the rednecks was being a control freak, a total nut-case. He wouldn't let his sister...or was it his wife? Come to think of it, I think it was both...Ewww!...out of his sight, didn't trust her to go anywhere, do anything. Eventually, she left him.

I can understand his feelings, just not his actions. Yeah, I get the urge occasionally to lock Buffy in a cupboard, to keep her safe from the world. The only problem with that is, well, apart from the obvious one of her kicking my ass, it would change her. She would no longer be the girl I fell in love with all those years ago, she'd be shy, wilted Buffy. Sounds horrible, doesn't it?

So, I trust her. I trust her to fight as hard as she can and return to me safe. I trust her to go out on her own, to be herself.

If you're wondering, yeah, I have discussed this with her. I don't think it would be honest of me not to. Yeah, that's the other half I was talking about. Trust and honesty, right. We've gone through too much of hiding from each other, hiding our thoughts, feelings and emotions, to not give each other anything but the truth.

Which brings us back to the here and now, and why it's 3am and I'm pacing the floor.

She's late.

Yeah, not much is it. She was due in an hour ago. The plan was a couple of cemeteries, a quick jog around some of the seedier neighbourhoods, then home to me for a sleepy hug, then sleep.

Another tangent, I know, but I wish I needed as little sleep as she does. If I don't get 6 hours a night, I'm hardly capable of functioning the next morning. Buffy? Well, she works, eats, patrols, snacks, gets to bed at anytime between 3 and 5 and gets up at 7, ready to face the world.

Don't get me wrong, I'm really pleased she has this ability. Hey, it even has boyfriend fringe benefits. Let me tell you... one night, she came home horny as hell, despite the fact it was 3 am. She woke me up with a... erm, wait, I don't think I should tell anyone about that. When I was fifteen, I'd have probably bragged about it everywhere or maybe not, actually. I didn't tell anyone about Cordy, the closet and me. Yay me, discretion learnt at an early stage. So, she woke me up, and I had one of the best nights of my life. What made it perfect, was that it was a Saturday, so we both slept in, then we made breakfast together.

That was the first time I think we knew. I mean, *really* knew. That we were together permanently, not just as boyfriend - girlfriend. In a way, it took the surprise out of the relationship, but in every other way it's good. We're going to get married, no doubt about it. She knows, and she knows I both know, and won't freak. Wow, that's a convoluted sentence. Impressed with my use of the word convoluted? Well, don't be, Giles used it on me once. I just remembered it.

Anyway, the whole 'I know, she knows' thing comes from when we were shopping last week. I had my arm around her, as I always try and do, when we're out; we both like it. Anyway, we stopped at a jewellery shop, and I didn't freak when she started pointing out engagement rings. All I started to wonder was if I could get it on credit, and if not, how long it would take to clear it off my credit card.

So, it's now 3:30 and she's still not here.

I always think about calling the police, but what the hell would I tell them? "Hi, my girlfriend's late home and I'm worried... Yeah, she was out fighting vampires and demons. Of course, she does this most nights. No, I'm not insane. No, it's not a crank call..." And that's not even considering how effective Sunnydale's finest haven't been in the past.

We have a police force that makes the keystone cops look like Miami Vice. It's a final thank you from the previous Mayor. You remember him? He tried to ascend into a pure blood demon, and we stopped him by blowing up our High School. I can't tell you how many fantasies that fulfilled for me. Well, fantasies that didn't include Buffy, Faith and 2 gallons of fresh cream. Erm, please don't ever mention that particular fantasy to Buffy, I don't think she'd appreciate it.

Faith would probably get a kick out of it though.

Ok, 4am. Now I am officially worried. There's a path in the floor where I have paced endlessly. I hope she doesn't get upset about the carpet. I'm thinking about putting a coat on and going to try and find her. Sure, it would be dangerous, and if she's fine, then she'll be mad at me. But I don't know

how long I can continue waiting here.

Dawn's asleep. I wish I was.

Wait that was the door.

"Hey, Honey," I said softly, looking at my tired Slayer.

"Still awake, Xan?" she replied, as quietly as I.

I just nodded. Trust and honesty, remember? Besides, it was a layered question. What she meant was "Have you been worrying about me all night?"

"I'm sorry," she said softly. "I stumbled across a small nest of them, at the end of patrol. One ran away and I had to chase it across town."

I smiled at her. "I was worried, Honey. I always will be when you're out of my sight."

She nodded, getting undressed. Despite everything, watching Buffy get ready for bed is one of the most amazing sights in the world. It's such amazing familiarity with me that she is completely at ease. She moves so incredibly gracefully, it makes my heart leap into my throat every time, and I want to thank God for what he has done for me.

She finished and climbed into bed, next to me. I'd quietly sat on it while she was changing. She snuggled up to me. I feel an amazing feeling of power when she does; possibly the most powerful human in the world comes to me for comfort and support. I'll never let her down in that department.

So, I've got this wonderful small form attached to my side now, and I can tell she's sleepy. I stroke her hair softly, and I'm no longer tired. I feel refreshed as I hold and stroke her. My worry drips away, leaving only contentment in its place.

"I love you," I whispered into her hair. I feel her move a little, hugging me tiredly, before she falls asleep.

So, my life is great. I was worried, but she's home, safe. She appreciates my concern, and I think she knows that I try hard not to stifle her. She comes home to me, and every time she does, I'll be grateful.

I've known she is the Slayer for almost as long as I've known her, it's as much as part of her as her hair. I've accepted it now, and I think she has, too. It's just an extra dimension I have to handle. And I do.

I feel her shift against me again, her breath stroking across my chest.

Sometimes it's great to be Xander Harris.